



Disability Awareness Month



Dorothea Lange

Photographer (1895 - 1965)

The insightful and compassionate photographs of Dorothea Lange (1895 - 1965) have exerted a profound influence on the development of modern documentary photography. Lange's concern for people, her appreciation of the ordinary, and the striking empathy she showed for her subjects make her unique

among photographers of her day.

Dorothea Lange walked with a limp due to contracting polio at the age of seven. She said of her disability - "I think it was perhaps the most important thing that happened to me. It formed me, guided me, instructed me, helped me, humiliated me, all those things at once. I've never gotten over it, and I am aware of the force and power of it." Lange spent her life traveling the world photographing mostly the disenfranchised. She documented the change on the homefront, especially among ethnic groups and workers uprooted by the war. Three months after Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered the relocation of Japanese-Americans into armed camps in the West. Soon after, the War Relocation Authority hired Lange to photograph Japanese neighborhoods, processing centers, and camp facilities.

Lange's earlier work documenting displaced farm families and migrant workers during the Great Depression did not prepare her for the disturbing racial and civil rights issues raised by the Japanese internment. Lange quickly found herself at odds with her employer and her subjects' persecutors, the United States government.

To capture the spirit of the camps, Lange created images that frequently juxtapose signs of human courage and dignity with physical evidence of the indignities of incarceration. Not surprisingly, many of Lange's photographs were censored by the federal government, itself conflicted by the existence of the camps.

The true impact of Lange's work was not felt until 1972, when the Whitney Museum incorporated twenty-seven of her photographs into *Executive Order 9066*, an exhibit about the Japanese internment. *New York Times* critic A.D. Coleman called Lange's photographs "documents of such a high order that they convey the feelings of the victims as well as the facts of the crime."